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# Hobbes on Religion and the Church between *The Elements of Law* and *Leviathan*: A Dramatic Change of Direction?

*Lodi Nauta*

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It has become something of an orthodoxy among Hobbes scholars to see a dramatic change in Hobbes's intellectual development in the 1640s, that is, between the earlier works *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic* (1640) and *De Cive* (1642) on the one hand and *Leviathan* (1651) on the other. Various accounts have been given to explain these differences, dependent on the issue at stake (rhetoric, methodology, political philosophy, theology, ecclesiastical polity), but what they have in common is their stress on the radical character of Hobbes's turn of mind in that crucial decade of his exile.

David Johnston, for example, has claimed that *Leviathan* is an intensely polemical work that differs significantly in style and content from the earlier works: "this dramatic change in literary form was connected with important changes in the substance of his political theory, and [was] ultimately symptomatic of an underlying metamorphosis in his conception of the nature and aims of political philosophy."<sup>1</sup> He sees the cause of this metamorphosis in Hobbes's growing realization that reason cannot assert itself. Most people are superstitious, gullible, and irrational, and these features are ingrained in them. Hence what Hobbes wants to do in *Leviathan* is to initiate a "cultural transformation" by bringing people to see their own blindness, thereby leading "men toward that enlightened, rational understanding of their own interests which he believes will form the firmest foundation possible for a truly lasting commonwealth."<sup>2</sup> Quentin Skinner too argues that "*Leviathan* embodies a new and far

<sup>1</sup> David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton, 1986), 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 150; cf. 137, 184 and *passim*.

more pessimistic sense of what the powers of unaided reason can hope to achieve.”<sup>3</sup> In his view this pessimism cleared the way for a reappraisal of the value of rhetoric, as well as a reconsideration of all the leading elements in the classical *ars rhetorica*. Thus in *Leviathan* Hobbes endorsed “the very approach he had earlier repudiated,” presenting us “not with two different versions of the same theory, but with two different and indeed antithetical theories, as well as with two correspondingly antithetical models of philosophical style.”<sup>4</sup> And while focusing more closely on Hobbes’s religious and ecclesiastical views, Richard Tuck has argued in various publications that on religion Hobbes “seems to have directly repudiated what he had argued in the earlier works, and in doing so he pushed *Leviathan* in a remarkably utopian direction.”<sup>5</sup> *Leviathan* represented “not just an extension or a modification of the arguments in *De Cive*, but their fundamental reversal.”<sup>6</sup>

It is obvious that *Leviathan* contains much new material, but I think this picture of Hobbes’s radically new departure vis-à-vis *The Elements* and *De Cive* is fundamentally mistaken. Instead, I shall argue that there is much more continuity between the three works than this picture suggests, and that many of the reasons which have been adduced to explain this development are not valid. In this article I shall focus on Hobbes’s position on religion and the church-state relationship in the 1640s. In another, related article I have concentrated on Hobbes’s views of reason and eloquence, criticizing the “pessimistic argument” (as I have termed it) and how it has been used especially by Johnston and Skinner (for all their differences) in arguing that *Leviathan* witnessed a reappraisal of the value of rhetoric.<sup>7</sup>

In a sense it is easy to see why recent scholarship has stressed the wide differences between the views Hobbes expressed in his early works and *Leviathan*. Almost half of *Leviathan* is devoted to religious issues, dismissing the idea of any interpretative authority for the Church, the idea of the natural eternity of the soul after death, and the traditional notions of purgatory and hell—to mention only a few salient points. In addition, he presented a highly unor-

<sup>3</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1997) 347.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 and 12.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Tuck, introduction to his edition of *Leviathan* (Cambridge 1991, 1996<sup>2</sup>), xxxviii-xxxix. Cf. his *Hobbes* (Oxford, 1989), 86ff.; “The ‘Christian Atheism’ of Thomas Hobbes” in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford 1992), 111-30; “The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes” in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, eds. N. Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge 1993), 120-38; and his preface to *De Cive*, ed. and trans. as *On the citizen* by Richard Tuck and M. Silverthorne (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Richard Tuck, “Warrender’s *De Cive*,” *Political Studies*, 33 (1985), 308-15, on 313.

<sup>7</sup> Lodi Nauta, “Hobbes the Pessimist? Continuity in Hobbes’s Views on Reason and Eloquence between *The Elements of Law* and *Leviathan*,” in *The British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 10 (2002), 31-54.

thodox interpretation of the Trinity. These extensive discussions have no parallel in the early works. It would therefore be foolish to deny the obvious fact that *Leviathan* contains much new material, but what I shall deny is that this means a “drastically new departure” on Hobbes’s part. Moreover I shall criticize the explanations which have been offered for this “fundamental reversal” of his position on religion and ecclesiastical polity.

The principal advocates here are David Johnston and Richard Tuck. Johnston makes much of Hobbes’s allegedly growing pessimism regarding the powers of human reason. Since I have argued elsewhere that there is no textual evidence for a growing pessimism on Hobbes’s part, it must suffice here to say that the apparent “optimistic note” of *The Elements* (thus Johnston) was already tempered in that work by Hobbes’s remarks on the weakness of men’s reasoning powers and their superstitious inclinations. And on the other hand the “pessimistic” tone of *Leviathan* apparently did not affect his account of man’s reason as a way out of the state of nature. It continued to be a postulate of his political philosophy that men can let the dictates of reason shape their decisions to curb their passions and live under the rule of an absolute sovereign. It is odd that Johnston, in illustrating the consequences of Hobbes’s growing pessimism for his views on religion and church government, does not compare *The Elements*, *De Cive*, and *Leviathan*. The discussion in the second half of his book focuses exclusively on *Leviathan*, and this has prevented him from seeing the connections and similarities among the works.

Richard Tuck’s principal argument does not rest on the dubious claim of a growing pessimistic sense of the powers of human reason. According to his account, Hobbes’s theological position in the early works was definitely royalist and Anglican, and it was only in the late 1640s that Hobbes radically changed his views and became the *bête noire* of many Anglican royalists (e.g., both factions among the advisers of Charles II), not to mention Catholics as well as many others. Hobbes’s “new theory” is that “the civil sovereign and *not* the Church had the power to interpret Scripture, and that this power was essentially the same as civil sovereigns had enjoyed before the coming of Christianity,”<sup>8</sup> whereas in the earlier works Hobbes had held that the sovereign was obliged to endorse the orthodoxy of the apostolic church. The terms in which Tuck describes this shift or (as he calls it) “fundamental reversal” vary from time to time. He argues that in *Leviathan* Hobbes had expanded the sphere of *natural* religion to include *all* religion: “Christianity was no longer a special case, but a civil religion like the religions of antiquity.”<sup>9</sup> A year later, however,

<sup>8</sup> “Hobbes’s ‘Christian Atheism,’ ” 125. However, Tuck also writes that “much of *Leviathan* was written while Hobbes was still in some sense a royalist” (preface to his ed. of *Leviathan*, xliii).

<sup>9</sup> “Hobbes’s ‘Christian Atheism,’ ” 125. Cf. D. P. Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan: The Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford, 1969), 206: “Hobbes is best understood as a Gentile.”

Tuck writes that the “most striking feature of Hobbes’s new theology is indeed the sharp division he now drew between Christianity and the religions of antiquity.”<sup>10</sup> As he continues: “The great idea Hobbes seems to have had in Paris in the late 1640s is that there could be a version of Christianity wholly detached from the religion of the gentiles, if the traditional doctrines both of the immateriality of the soul and of *hell* were overthrown.”<sup>11</sup> Hobbes’s principal aim is to relieve men of their fears. If there is no hell in the traditional sense of a place of eternal torments, then people may hope for eternal life. In that sense Hobbes’s theory is said to be “very similar to that of the late Renaissance sceptics who believed that the path to ‘wisdom’ lay in the renunciation of both belief and emotion, and that the wise man would not be led into upsetting and dangerous courses of action by any cognitive commitments.”<sup>12</sup> The situation at the exile court, where Hobbes had some unpleasant experiences with Anglican royalists, may have contributed to this shift away from orthodox Anglicanism. The reading of the works of Catholic thinkers such as Denis Petau, Kenelm Digby, Thomas White, Henry Holden, and John Sargeant, may also have stimulated Hobbes to develop his positions on hell, the soul, church government, the Trinity, and eschatology. It is important to note that for Tuck Hobbes’s new position on church government is related to the development of his heterodox positions in theology, for only when Hobbes had established that the Church had no interpretative authority was he “able to give free rein to his own metaphysical speculations within the much looser regime of modern England.”<sup>13</sup> Apart from the inconsistency between the two accounts of what Hobbes argued for in *Leviathan*—Christianity as “a civil religion like the religions of antiquity” versus Christianity as “wholly detached from the religion of the gentiles”—there are serious problems with this interpretation of a radical break between the early works and *Leviathan* and the association of Hobbes’s theory with late Renaissance skepticism.

In what follows I shall consider three topics which have been taken as prime illustrations of Hobbes’s “new departure”: the nature and fate of the soul; the character of magic, prophecy, and revelation; and church-state relations. In *Leviathan* Hobbes discussed the traditional views on these topics under the headings of abuses of Scripture,<sup>14</sup> and it is not surprising that scriptural exegesis plays a large role in countering these abuses and exegetical errors. After having reviewed the textual basis for these large claims about Hobbes’s “new departure,” I shall come back to the broader implications of these prevalent interpretations.

<sup>10</sup> “The civil religion of Thomas Hobbes,” 129.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 130 (his italics).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>13</sup> “Hobbes’s ‘Christian Atheism,’ ” 127.

<sup>14</sup> *Leviathan*, ch. 44. I shall refer to Tuck’s ed. as well as Molesworth’s (London, 1839, reprint Aalen 1966), *OL*—*Opera Latina*, *EW*—the *English Works*.

## Soul

Hobbes's materialist philosophy led him to deny the soul's spirituality and its disembodied, eternal existence after the body's death. Likewise, he questioned the spiritual character of angels. All that there is, in his view, is matter in motion: hence there is no place for substances that are incorporeal. This view, however, is not new with *Leviathan*, as Johnston's account seems to suggest.<sup>15</sup> Already in *The Elements* Hobbes concluded that "incorporeal body" is but an "absurdity of speech," and that Scripture "favoureth them more, who hold angels and spirits for corporeal, than them that hold the contrary."<sup>16</sup> Even the immortality of the soul is implicitly relegated to the domain of "images that appear in the dark to children, and such as have strong fears, and other strong imaginations."

In this passage, Hobbes starts to say that the word "spirit" means a natural body, "but of such subtilty that it worketh not on the senses." Supernatural spirits "commonly signify some substance without dimension; which two words flatly contradict one another." The implication that God must also be a natural body is not drawn here in explicit terms (nor yet in the English *Leviathan*<sup>17</sup>), but it follows naturally from Hobbes's denial of the existence of substances without dimension: "spirit" is predicated of God "as signification of our reverence, who desire to abstract from him all corporeal grossness." The word "grossness" is important here, for taken together with the definition of spirit just given, the final conclusion can only be that God is a natural body of very fine subtlety, that is, not to be perceived by the senses.

Hobbes goes on to discuss other spirits. At first he sounds orthodox enough: "We who are Christians" acknowledge that there are such things as angels, spirits, and human souls, and that these are immortal. The steps that immediately follow, however, show clearly what his real conviction is, namely that so-called spiritual beings such as angels and human souls are material, corporeal substances. His reasons are, first, that it is impossible to have natural evidence of their existence. Second, the Bible (the source of supernatural "evidence," we may say, which Christians should certainly acknowledge) does not adduce evidence for such a belief, for it seems to favor "them more, who hold angels and spirits for corporeal, than them that hold the contrary." Third, this interpre-

<sup>15</sup> Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 143-44.

<sup>16</sup> I have used F. Tönnies's edition (London, 1889, repr. with a new introd. by M. M. Goldsmith, London, 1969) but give also references to the Molesworth edition. For this and the following quotation see I.xi.4-5 (pp. 55-56/*EW*, IV, 61-62).

<sup>17</sup> In a lost letter to Mersenne from 1640 Hobbes had already written about "de anima et Deo corporeis, de spiritu interno," and expressed his belief that there are only corporeal substances; see K. Schuhmann's reconstruction of this letter in his *Hobbes: Une Chronique. Cheminement de sa pensée et de sa vie* (Paris, 1998), 63.

tation is in line with (or rather motivated by) common speech, according to which “incorporeal body” is but an absurdity, and concerning the soul “it is plain contradiction in natural discourse, to say of the soul of man, that it is *tota in toto*, and: *tota in qualibet parte corporis*, grounded neither upon reason nor revelation.” The conclusion cannot be but that angels and human souls are material, corporeal substances.

This might all be interpreted as contradicting the soul’s immortality with which the argument began, and also Hobbes’s words elsewhere in *The Elements* that the immortality of the soul is a fundamental article of Christian faith.<sup>18</sup> Therefore Tuck writes: “Though in each of them [i.e., *The Elements* and *De Cive*], for example, he described the soul as material (though of course not ‘gross,’ i.e. not fully apprehensible by the senses), he was at pains to insist that it was *nevertheless* immortal.”<sup>19</sup> But the context of Hobbes’s remark that the immortality of the soul is a fundamental article of Christian faith makes clear what Hobbes means: “... and [belief] of the immortality of the soul, without which we cannot believe he [i.e. Christ] is a Saviour.” The soul’s immortality is thus closely related with Christ’s Day of Judgment, on which, as he was later to write in *Leviathan*, “the Faithfull shall rise again, with glorious, and spirituall Bodies, and bee his Subjects in that his Kingdome, which shall be Eternall.”<sup>20</sup> The immortality begins only then (for the glorious, that is). Therefore, Hobbes’s professed belief in the soul’s immortality is perfectly compatible with a rejection of the doctrine of “the Naturall Eternity of separated Soules,” that is the eternal existence of the disembodied soul, after the body’s death, waiting in Purgatory for its final Judgment—a point made abundantly clear in *Leviathan*.<sup>21</sup>

What Hobbes certainly did not discuss in *The Elements* are the doctrines of hell and purgatory which were logical outcomes of such a belief in the immateriality and the natural eternity of the soul. As he writes in *Leviathan*:<sup>22</sup>

This window [i.e. the eternal soul] it is, that gives entrance to the Dark Doctrine, first, of Eternall Torments, and afterwards of Purgatory, and consequently of the walking abroad [...] of the Ghosts of men deceased; and thereby to the pretences of Exorcisme and Conjurat[i]on of Phantasmes; as also of Invocation of men dead; and to the Doctrine of Indulgences; that is to say, of exemption for a time, or for ever, from the fire of Purgatory, wherein these Incorporeall Substances are pretended by burning to be cleansed, and made fit for Heaven.

<sup>18</sup> II.vi.6 (p. 148/*EW*, IV, 175).

<sup>19</sup> Introduction to his ed. of *Leviathan*, xl (my italics).

<sup>20</sup> *Leviathan*, ch. 44 (p. 432/*EW*, III, 625).

<sup>21</sup> E.g., *Leviathan*, ch. 44 (p. 433/*EW*, III, 627). Cf. the appendix to the Latin *Leviathan*, *OL*, III, 564-65.

<sup>22</sup> *Leviathan*, ch. 44 (p. 426/*EW*, III, 615-16).

By way of these doctrines the Church continued to have a firm grasp over their subjects, thereby loosening the dependence of subjects on their sovereign. In particular this last aspect worried Hobbes, for if the Church had the power to influence the course of “life” of a disembodied soul after life on earth, its power extended far beyond that of the sovereign: “It is impossible a Common-wealth should stand, where any other than the Sovereign, hath a power of giving greater rewards than Life; and of inflicting greater punishments, than Death.”<sup>23</sup> The danger of sedition, however, was already on Hobbes’s mind when writing *The Elements*. Indeed, the wording is quite similar:<sup>24</sup>

It is manifest therefore that they who have sovereign power, are immediate rulers of the church under Christ, and all others but subordinate to them. If that were not, but kings should command one thing upon pain of death, and priests another upon pain of damnation, it would be impossible that peace and religion should stand together.

Though Hobbes does not mention hell here, it is clear that he realized that the notion of eternal punishment could conflict with the absolute power of the sovereign. I think therefore that the discussion in *The Elements* clearly looks forward to the more extensive discussion on the mortality of the soul and to the new discussions of hell in *Leviathan* rather than that Hobbes came up with a new, “great idea” in the late 1640s and only then “perceived that any doctrine of an immaterial soul and eternal torment must add a whole new set of fears to those which men possess by nature.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in *The Elements* he writes that the belief in incorporeal spirits is caused by “the ignorance of what those things are which are called spectra, images that appear in the dark to children, and such as have strong fears, and other strong imaginations [...] For taking them to be things really without us, like bodies, and seeing them to come and vanish so strangely as they do, unlike to bodies; what could they call them else, but incorporeal bodies? which is not a name, but an absurdity of speech.” The power of fear was not something Hobbes discovered in Paris as late as 1647/48.

### Miracles, Prophecy, and Magic

Did Hobbes come to stress only in *Leviathan* men’s superstitious character as an easy prey for false prophets, magicians, enchanter, and other charlatans? This is Johnston’s thesis. It is well known of course that Hobbes rationalized

<sup>23</sup> Ch. 38 (pp. 306-7/*EW*, III, 437). Cf. ch. 46 (p. 465/*EW*, III, 675) on the control by the Church over their subjects.

<sup>24</sup> II, vii, 10 (p. 167/*EW*, IV, 199).

<sup>25</sup> Tuck, “The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes,” 130. I shall put these conclusions in broader perspective at the end of this article.



supernatural events such as revelation, miracles, magical acts, and prophecies, thereby apparently destroying the pillars on which, according to many, the Church was founded. Such skepticism was certainly not unique to him, but he formulated it with such pointedness and sarcasm that it earned him the reputation of being an atheist. I shall mention a few salient features of this attitude. The belief that the Bible was the word of God was something we have received from the teaching of others.<sup>26</sup> Claims to divine revelation are treated with skepticism by Hobbes, for anybody may claim to have had divine revelation, but no one should be obliged to believe such a person. In the final analysis, as a recent commentator has written, “it is unclear” that Hobbes held that “reason and historical evidence were sufficient to provide good grounds for belief in supernatural truths.”<sup>27</sup>

We already find the same attitude in *The Elements*. In chapter 11 he writes that “the knowledge we have that the Scriptures are the word of God, is only faith,” and faith consists “in the trust we have in other men.”<sup>28</sup> Of course, faith derives ultimately from the work of God, since “hearing and teaching, both which are natural, are the work of God,” but this formulation is as vague as the one in *Leviathan* that “it is beleaved on all hands, that the first and originall *Author* of them [i.e. the Scriptures] is God.”<sup>29</sup> It is in this rather diluted sense of “the divine spirit” that it is said to be responsible for our faith:<sup>30</sup>

The faith therefore wherewith we believe, is the Spirit of God, in that sense, by which the Spirit of God giveth to one man wisdom and cunning in workmanship more than to another; and by which he effecteth also in other points pertaining to our ordinary life, that one man believeth that, which upon the same grounds another doth not; and one man reverenceth the opinion, and obeyeth the commands of his superiors and others not.

By the same token, Hobbes’s discussion of miracles and prophecy is shot through with skepticism. Again, *Leviathan* offers a far more extensive discussion, but the basic attitude is already found in *The Elements*. In both works, the possibility of miracles is not denied from the outset, but the whole discussion tends towards an undermining of their supernatural character. The essential mark of a prophet is whether his message conforms to the doctrine that “Jesus is come in the flesh,” which Hobbes considers the sole foundation of Christian

<sup>26</sup> *Leviathan*, ch. 43 (p. 406/*EW*, III, 589); ch. 32 (p. 256/*EW*, III, 361).

<sup>27</sup> Johann P. Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context* (London, 1992), 111.

<sup>28</sup> I, xi, 8 (p. 58/*EW*, IV, 64).

<sup>29</sup> *Leviathan*, ch. 33 (p. 267/*EW*, III, 377-78).

<sup>30</sup> I, xi, 9 (p. 59/*EW*, IV, 65); cf. the same point in *Leviathan*, ch. 33 (p. 267/*EW*, III, 378).

faith (the *unum necessarium* of Luke 10:42). Did not the Lord forbid us to allow our faith to be ruled by miracles? In both works Hobbes gives the same Biblical quotations, from which he concludes that<sup>31</sup>

we are not to judge whether the doctrine be true or no, by the angel; but whether the angel saith true or no, by the doctrine [...] The knowledge therefore we have of good and evil inspiration, cometh not by vision of an angel that may teach it, nor by a miracle that may seem to confirm it; but by conformity of doctrine with this article and fundamental point of Christian faith.

Hobbes shared with many Protestant writers the belief that miracles had ceased after the time of the apostles. The Scriptures had taken their place, and “recompense the want of all other Prophecy; and from which, by wise and learned interpretation, and carefull ratiocination, all rules and precepts necessary to the knowledge of our duty both to God and man, without Enthousiasme, or supernaturall Inspiration.”<sup>32</sup> This too was already formulated in *The Elements*:<sup>33</sup>

since God speaketh not in these days to any man by his private interpretation of the Scriptures, nor by the interpretation of any power, above, or not depending on the sovereign power of every commonwealth; it remaineth that he speaketh by his vice-gods, or lieutenants here on earth, that is to say, by sovereign kings, or such as have sovereign authority as well as they.

It is clear that Hobbes's materialist philosophy, already well-formed in *The Elements*, left hardly any room for supernatural events, certainly not for the clergy who employed them as a political weapon in order to strengthen their power. True, the frontal attack on the rituals of the Roman Catholic Church, which he saw as in no way different from the Egyptian conjurers who turned water into blood and rods into serpents, is absent from *The Elements*. Hobbes's scathing remarks on the “Conjuration or Incantation” spoken at the sacraments of the Eucharist, baptism, and “other rites, as of Marriage, of Extreme Unction, of Visitation of the Sick, of Consecrating Churches, and Church-yards, and the

<sup>31</sup> *The Elements*, I.xi.7 (p. 57/*EW* IV.63-64); the same in *Leviathan*, ch. 32 (pp. 257-58/*EW*, III, 362-63); cf. *De Cive* XVI.11 (ed. H. Warrender [Oxford, 1984], 240-41; transl. Tuck and Silverthorne, 194).

<sup>32</sup> *Leviathan*, ch. 32 (p. 259/*EW*, III, 365).

<sup>33</sup> *The Elements*, II.vii.11 (p. 167/*EW*, IV, 199). I will discuss the full implications of this passage in the next section.

like,” do not have their parallel in *The Elements*. But this sort of critique was in line with what Hobbes did write in *The Elements*:<sup>34</sup>

such doctrines as concern the manner of the real presence, wherein are mingled tenets of faith concerning the omnipotency and divinity of Christ, with the tenets of Aristotle and the Peripatetics concerning substance and accidents, species, hypostasis and the subsistence and migration of accidents from place to place; words some of them without meaning, and nothing but the canting of Grecian sophisters

followed by the famous words of St. Paul “beware lest there be any man that spoil you through philosophy and vain deceits....” Though the notion of transubstantiation is not criticized here in explicit terms, it is clear from expressions such as “the migration of accidents” that this must have been on Hobbes’s mind.

What these comparisons also show is that *Leviathan*—pace Johnston—does not contain a new direction in Hobbes’s analysis of man’s irrational and superstitious nature, and a new critique of the way the Church took advantage of that. Many of his criticisms continued to be focused on the role of language—for example, in the abuses of Scripture, in the reification of abstract concepts, in the literal interpretation of expressions such as “this is my body”—and I see therefore no real evidence for the view that the “opposition between reason and rhetoric,” which is said to be characteristic for *The Elements*, “was replaced by a new theme, that of the struggle between enlightenment and superstition” in *Leviathan*.<sup>35</sup>

### Church-State Relations

Because the claim by the Church to represent the Kingdom of God on earth formed the most direct threat to Hobbes’s idea of the absolute power of the civil sovereign, it is not surprising that Hobbes attacked this claim in all its guises with great vehemence. He called this claim the “greatest, and main abuse of Scripture, and to which almost all the rest are either consequent, or subservient.”<sup>36</sup> From Hobbes’s point of view, this is the natural order of treatment. If the Church wanted to have dominion over its subjects, it should inculcate belief in purgatory and hell, in disembodied souls and immaterial spirits in general. By

<sup>34</sup> II.vi.9 (p. 153/*EW*, IV, 181); the quotation from *Leviathan* is from ch. 44 (p. 424/*EW*, III, 613); on the impossibility of the migration of accidents see already the first section of Hobbes’s *Short Tract* from 1632/33 (ed. by Tönnies in his ed. of *The Elements of Law*, 193-97; new ed. Jean Bernhardt [Paris, 1988]).

<sup>35</sup> Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 131 (my italics). Cf. *De Cive*. XVI.1, ed. Warrender, 234; trans. Tuck and Silverthorne, 187-88. *De Cive* is largely ignored by Johnston.

<sup>36</sup> *Leviathan*, ch. 44 (p. 419/*EW*, III, 605).

claiming to have received the keys to bind or to loose, the clergy could employ this spiritual power to frighten and so gain control over their subjects, thereby loosening the bonds of obedience which should exist between subjects and their civil sovereign.

It is especially on the subject of the church-state relationship that, according to modern scholars, Hobbes's views on the relation between ecclesiastical and secular power underwent extensive modification during the 1640s. These changes were motivated by the "cultural transformation" (Johnston) which Hobbes hoped to attain, and this gives his work a "utopian direction" (Tuck).

Johnston claims that in *De Cive* "Hobbes accepts as legitimate the distinction between spiritual and temporal things without hinting at the wholesale attack upon the distinction between spiritual and temporal powers he was to mount later, in *Leviathan*."<sup>37</sup> And according to Tuck, Hobbes had still argued in *De Cive* that the sovereign should accept the Christian messages which were handed down from the time of Christ through the apostolic succession of priesthood. As Hobbes himself wrote: the holder of sovereign power "is obliged to interpret holy scripture [...] by means of duly ordained *Ecclesiastics*."<sup>38</sup> Tuck concludes: "So in the vital area of religion, Hobbes's sovereign was obliged to endorse the orthodoxy of the apostolic Church, and enforce its teachings upon his citizens; and there is nothing in the theology of Hobbes's early works which clearly contradicts this orthodoxy."<sup>39</sup> I think however that a closer look at *The Elements* and *De Cive* shows that there is more continuity in Hobbes's thinking on the issue of ecclesiastical power than a comparison between some isolated passages from *De Cive* and *Leviathan* seems to suggest.

In *The Elements* Hobbes had already insisted in explicit terms that no sovereign should be subject to any ecclesiastical power: "in no case can the sovereign power of a commonwealth be subject to any authority ecclesiastical, besides that of Christ himself," and "[i]t is manifest therefore that they who have sovereign power, are immediate rulers of the church under Christ, and all other but subordinate to them. And though he be informed concerning the kingdom of heaven, and subject himself thereto at the persuasions of persons ecclesiastical, yet is not he thereby subject to their government and rule."<sup>40</sup> The word "persuasion" is important here. It refers to what ecclesiastics teach about articles of faith, i.e., articles whose truth cannot be examined by natural reason. These articles can be taught only by way of advising or persuading people to embrace the Christian doctrine. For "it was not congruent to the style of the King of Heaven to constrain men to submit their actions to him, but to advise them only," and this holds true not only for the apostles then but also for pas-

<sup>37</sup> *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 144, n. 23, referring to *De Cive* XVII.14.

<sup>38</sup> XVII.28, ed. Warrender, 279, transl. Tuck and Silverthorne, 233.

<sup>39</sup> Introduction to his ed. of *Leviathan*, xl.

<sup>40</sup> II, vii, 10 (p. 167/*EW*, IV, 198).

tors now.<sup>41</sup> When at the end of *The Elements* Hobbes divides “the doctrine of our Saviour” into a moral, a theological, and an ecclesiastical part, he makes the same point, writing that “the theological which containeth those articles concerning the divinity and kingdom of our Saviour, without which there is no salvation, is not delivered in the nature of laws, but of counsel and direction, how to avoid the punishment, which by the violation of the moral law, men are subject to.”<sup>42</sup> Concerning “the ecclesiastical part,” which is the ecclesiastical law, he says that it is part of the civil law, “proceeding from the power of ecclesiastical government, given by our Saviour to all Christian sovereigns, as his immediate vicars.”

Thus, in *The Elements* Hobbes clearly holds that spiritual and civil powers must reside in one man (or council), i.e., the civil sovereign. There is no separation of spiritual from civil (or temporal) powers. The civil sovereign—not the Church, the pope, the bishops, or the clergy in general—is Christ’s immediate vicar or his lieutenant here on earth.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the teaching of Christian faith does not fall under any law, and hence has nothing to do with dominion.<sup>44</sup> No one is obliged to accept the Christian faith *in foro interno*, and for those who have accepted it, the belief that Jesus is the Christ is sufficient for salvation. The rest is “superstruction” (II, vi, 5), and likely to mislead rather than to instruct and enlighten. Even when the sovereign listens to what ecclesiastics say concerning the kingdom of heaven, their teachings have the status of no more than advice and persuasion, and this holds true for everyone. And what is there to advise if the only point of faith necessary to salvation is that Jesus is the Christ? Most other theological questions are either bogus or not relevant for salvation, or might even contain seditious elements.

My conclusion from all this is that already in *The Elements*, Hobbes was teaching that there is no independent role for the clergy to play in deciding matters of faith, which comes close to the teaching in *Leviathan*: clerics have only spiritual power in so far as the civil sovereign has granted it to them. This is also brought out very clearly by Hobbes’s suggestion in *The Elements* that in principle there is nothing to prevent the civil sovereign, as God’s lieutenant here on earth, to perform duties traditionally assigned to clerics—a point which Hobbes is supposed to have made not earlier than in *Leviathan*:<sup>45</sup> “And though

<sup>41</sup> II, vii, 9 (p. 164/*EW*, IV, 195-96).

<sup>42</sup> II, x, 7 (p. 187-88/*EW*, IV, 224-25). The next quotation is from II.x.8 (p. 189/*EW*, IV, 226).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. also II, vi, 13 (p. 158/*EW*, IV, 187-88).

<sup>44</sup> Johnston does not clearly see this difference; see his *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 144 n.23 and 170, and compare this with, e.g., *De Cive* XVII (ed. Warrender, 279; transl. Tuck and Silverthorne, 233).

<sup>45</sup> *The Elements* II.vii.11 (p. 167/*EW*, IV, 199); *Leviathan* ch. 42 (p. 374/*EW*, III, 541). In his otherwise excellent book, Sommerville wrongly suggests that Hobbes departs from his earlier teaching on this point (*Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context*, 121).

kings take not upon them the ministerial priesthood (as they might if it pleased them) yet are they not so merely laic, as not to have sacerdotal jurisdiction." In *Leviathan* Hobbes spells these functions out, declaring that the sovereign can preach, administer the sacraments, consecrate "both Temples, and Pastors to Gods service."

This can also be seen in Hobbes's views on the apostolic succession. It has been argued that although in *The Elements* Hobbes assigned a special role for the Church vis-à-vis the civil sovereign, apostolic succession was subsequently denuded of all significance. Indeed, as Tuck argues, "Hobbes asserted that even the Apostles themselves did not possess a monopoly of interpretative power," and he quotes from *Leviathan*: "when a difficulty arose, the Apostles and Elders of the Church assembled themselves together, and determined what should be preached, and taught, and how they should Interpret the Scriptures to the People; but took not from the People the liberty to read, and Interpret them to themselves."<sup>46</sup> But already in *The Elements* we find the same idea: "... no human law is intended to oblige the conscience of a man, but the actions only [...] Nor did the apostles themselves pretend dominion over men's consciences concerning the faith they preached, but only persuasion and instruction."<sup>47</sup>

Since all these points can be found in extenso in *Leviathan*, there is no reason to argue for any drastic change in Hobbes's views. Again, his tone became sharper and more polemical because of the political developments of the 1640s, for example the attempt by the Presbyterians to establish a harsh and intolerant system of church government (which was defeated by 1648), and new issues were addressed (for example tithes) and other points, latent in the earlier works, were now fully elaborated.

Scholars who have argued that Hobbes altered his account drastically between his early works and *Leviathan*, however, have focused on *De Cive*—not on *The Elements*—vis-à-vis *Leviathan*. We have seen that the account of *The Elements* does not warrant such a conclusion. What about *De Cive* then? The points of difference seem to be the following.<sup>48</sup> (1) In *De Cive* the sovereign is said to be obliged to interpret Scriptures by means of duly ordained ecclesiastics, which seems to mean that the clergy, having been granted spiritual power, is to decide in matters of faith.<sup>49</sup> (In *Leviathan*, as has been said, clerics are said to have no spiritual power whatever, except that granted by the sovereign; there is no difference between temporal and spiritual power.) (2) The Church is responsible for the *ordination or consecration* of pastors by the laying on of hands, by which they receive their infallibility in matters of faith. The *election*

<sup>46</sup> "The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes," 128; *Leviathan*, ch. 42 (p. 355-56/*EW*, III, 512).

<sup>47</sup> II, 6, 3 (p. 146/*EW*, IV, 172).

<sup>48</sup> I extract these points from the excellent discussion by Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context*, 119-27.

<sup>49</sup> *De Cive*, XVII.28, ed. Warrender, 279, transl. Tuck and Silverthorne, 233.

of a pastor, however, is a matter of the civil sovereign as head of the Church. (In *Leviathan* this is denied; the laying on of hands in the New Testament merely points to the man who has been elected. It does not indicate that the newly consecrated pastor has been granted any power.) (3) In *De Cive* (second and later editions, though not in the first) a distinction is made between bishops and other clerics. (In *Leviathan* it is written that “*Bishop, Pastor, Elder, Doctor*, that is to say, *Teacher*, were but so many divers names of the same Office in the time of the Apostles.”<sup>50</sup>) (4) In *De Cive* Hobbes is reticent about whether a civil sovereign can exercise the duties of the clergy. (In *Leviathan*, as we have seen, this is explicitly allowed.) (5) In *De Cive* nothing is said about tithes. (In *Leviathan*, it is denied that tithes were due to the clergy by divine right.)

Without denying the fact that in *De Cive* Hobbes is often more cautious in his formulations and seemingly more Anglican than in *Leviathan*, the differences are more apparent than real. Hobbes stresses repeatedly the point that the clergy can have no dominion. And even in matters of faith, the sovereign can decide which point belongs to which sphere: “And so in *Christian* commonwealths judgement of *spiritual* and *temporal* matters belongs to the civil authority. And the man or assembly which holds sovereign power is the head of both the *commonwealth* and the Church; for a *Christian Church* and a *Christian commonwealth* are one and the same thing.”<sup>51</sup> Here too, room for advice is extremely limited, for it can only concern the fundamental teaching of Christian faith, about which there is not much to advise. And the status of their advice is also dubious. Sovereigns are obliged to interpret Scripture according to the advice of properly ordained clerics, Hobbes writes, but he does not tell us by what laws they are required to do this. As Sommerville justly remarks: “In *De Cive*, however, Hobbes held that Christ declared only old laws, which had already been promulgated. All the laws which Christ endorsed, he argued, were either natural or else had been introduced by men who held sovereignty over the people of Israel [...] Since none of these laws deal with the powers of Christian clerics, it follows that there are no laws at all on the rights of the clergy—unless the sovereign happens to introduce them.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, as Sommerville has also argued, Hobbes writes elsewhere in *De Cive* that to claim infallibility means to claim dominion (XVIII.14), but dominion is the last thing Hobbes will grant to the clergy. Taking Hobbes’s own precept seriously that “it is not the bare Words, but the Scope of the writer that giveth the true light, by which any writing is to bee interpreted,”<sup>53</sup> we should not put too much emphasis on the claim that sovereigns should employ properly ordained clerics in

<sup>50</sup> Ch. 42 (p. 365/*EW*, III, 526).

<sup>51</sup> XVII.28, ed. Warrender, 279, transl. Tuck and Silverthorne, 233.

<sup>52</sup> Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context*, 125.

<sup>53</sup> *Leviathan*, ch. 43 (p. 415/*EW*, III, 602).

interpreting Scripture, because it does not cohere with the rest of what Hobbes says in *De Cive*.

Related to this is the theological justification for the rights of sovereignty. Edwin Curley argues that Hobbes used the key text, Romans 13 ("For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God ...") in *De Cive* XI.6, apparently subscribing to a royalist point of view, but did not appeal to it in *Leviathan*, in this context.<sup>54</sup> Curley gives as his reason that "the political theory of Romans 13 assumes that the rights of the sovereign are conferred on him by God," which goes against Hobbes's notion that they are conferred on him by consent of people. But I would point out that the context of *De Cive* XI.6 makes clear that Romans 13 is quoted primarily as argument that subjects of princes "owe them simple and absolute obedience," just like the other biblical quotations given there.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Hobbes's notion that the rights of the sovereign are conferred on him by consent of people is already explicitly argued for in *De Cive* (e.g., VI.13: "The citizens have granted him absolute power" as the chapter heading has it).

Concerning the second and third difference mentioned above—his account of the hierarchy in the primitive church (with the implication that the episcopacy in his time had greater power than the rest of the clergy) and the way elders were ordained—Hobbes certainly modified his position somewhat.<sup>56</sup> In the early works he was willing to admit that a hierarchy in the primitive church did exist, and still held that the apostles themselves chose the elders and consecrated them. This implies that the ordination was an event relatively autonomous from the church of a certain city (i.e., from the civil authority).<sup>57</sup> But there is no suggestion in the account in the early works that the act of consecration was something which could lead to an autonomous power that could regulate its own affairs internally by the laying on of hands. In *De Cive*, for example, it is clearly said that "Prophets and Teachers have to be examined by a *Church* before they are accepted,"<sup>58</sup> a Church being nothing else than an individual commonwealth ruled by a sovereign (cf. XVII.22).<sup>59</sup> And even more important is what Hobbes also says here: "*by what authority* did it happen that what those Prophets and Teachers said proceeded from a holy spirit was ac-

<sup>54</sup> Edwin Curley, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis, 1994), xxxix.

<sup>55</sup> *De Cive* XI.6, transl. Tuck and Silverthorne, 129.

<sup>56</sup> *The Elements* II, vii, 8 (p. 164/*EW*, IV, 194). Cf. *Leviathan*, ch. 42 (365/*EW*, III, 526).

<sup>57</sup> *De Cive* XVII.24, ed. Warrender, 270, transl. Tuck and Silverthorne, 224.

<sup>58</sup> XVII.24, ed. Warrender, 269, transl. Tuck and Silverthorne, 223; cf. XVII.22.

<sup>59</sup> Patricia Springborg rightly points out that this definition of the church (*ecclesia*) in the New Testament era as a "quasi-parliamentary institution convened in the person of the king" is paradoxical in the light of Hobbes's claim that the mission of the church is nongovernmental ("Hobbes on Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. T. Sorell [Cambridge, 1996], 346-80, on 359).



cepted as a command of the holy Spirit? the reply must be: *by the Authority of the Church at Antioch*.” Thus, the commonwealth ruled by a sovereign is to decide what must be counted as divine doctrine—a point of view which was therefore not new in *Leviathan*, though of course in that work he developed its implications mercilessly.

Whatever the details of the procedure of election and ordination, no argument can be based on the account in the early works that members of the clergy possess more power than the sovereign grants them. There is a strict parallel between, for example, jurisdiction and the interpretation of the Scripture. Just as law-makers and interpreters of the law do not form any force independent of the sovereign’s power, and have only so much power as is granted by the sovereign, so the same is true for the interpreters of the holy scripture: “It therefore plainly follows that in a Christian commonwealth *obedience* is owed to sovereign rulers in all things, both *spiritual* and *temporal*.”<sup>60</sup> The sovereign’s obligation to interpret the Scriptures by means of duly ordained Ecclesiastics is a self-imposed obligation to listen to people to whom he had delegated some power. This is in no way different from *Leviathan* where he writes: “If they please therefore, they may (as many Christian Kings now doe) commit the government of their Subjects in matters of Religion to the Pope; but then the Pope is in that point Subordinate to them, and exerciseth that Charge in anothers Dominion *Iure Civili*, in the Right of the Civill Soveraign; not *Iure Divino*, in Gods Right.”<sup>61</sup>

#### Ecclesiastical Polity and Theological Speculation

A careful comparison of the three works by Hobbes has shown that there is no textual evidence for the view that a “drastically new departure” or a “fundamental reversion” of his position took place between the two earlier works and *Leviathan*. As we have seen, the Anglicanism of those early writings was not well integrated into the rest of the arguments.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, in a letter from 1641 to William Cavendish, Earl of Devonshire, Hobbes had already lent his support to the charge that certain bishops had misbehaved (“Couetousnesse and supercilious behaiour”) and had said that he would favor schemes in which the gov-

<sup>60</sup> *De Cive* XVIII.13, ed. Warrender, 291, trans. Tuck and Silverthorne, 245.

<sup>61</sup> Ch. 42 (378/*EW*, III, 546). Hence I cannot agree with Tuck who writes that it was not earlier than in *Leviathan* that Hobbes argued that “the sovereign had to apply to the religion of his commonwealth the same set of considerations which governed his approach to its secular affairs” (introduction to *Leviathan*, xl).

<sup>62</sup> Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context*, 127 on *De Cive*: “its Anglicanism was skin-deep.” Cf. Springborg, “Hobbes on Religion,” 347: “the grand structure of his arguments [on religion] was not subject to change,” though the theme of this excellent article is not the question of the (dis)continuity in Hobbes’s thinking.

ernment of the church was placed in the hands of lay commissioners.<sup>63</sup> Because the “dispute for [precedence] betwene the *spirituall* and *civill* power, has of late more then any other thing in the world, bene the cause of *ciuill warres*, in all places of Christendome,” he wanted “all Church gouernment [to] depend on the state”; otherwise there would be no unity in the Church. Viewed against this background, it is not surprising to find Hobbes making no distinction between bishops and other clerics in the first edition of *De Cive* from 1642: this was certainly a heterodox position in Anglican royalist circles where the notion of divine right episcopacy was of fundamental importance. Apparently, Hobbes did not want to humiliate his royalist Anglican friends, and added in the second edition of *De Cive* that not all presbyters had been bishops in early Christian times (cf. *De Cive* XVII, 24), but he gave no arguments to support the idea that they were to be distinguished for this difference nor did he say anything about the nature of the difference (between them). This indeed is only to be expected in the light of his position that no cleric holds any power.<sup>64</sup> The more circumspect phrasing in the early works, as well as the presence of seemingly current Anglican positions, may have contributed to the favorable reception of *De Cive* among Hobbes's Anglican royalist friends such as Henry Hammond, Robert Payne, and Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, though to what extent they subscribed to all the arguments is far from clear. Clarendon, for instance, was far from a loyal royalist at the time of the Long Parliament,<sup>65</sup> and Payne was clearly more concerned with Hobbes's reputation than with the soundness of his arguments (“all truths are not fit to be told at all times,” as he writes in a letter to Sheldon in 1650).<sup>66</sup> But we should not forget its critics. Bramhall

<sup>63</sup> *Thomas Hobbes: The Correspondence*, ed. N. Malcolm (2 vols.; Oxford, 1994), i, 120 (Letter 37, dated 23 July/2 August 1641). Tuck does not refer to this letter.

<sup>64</sup> This position is in no way undermined by the passages from Hobbes's critique of White's *De mundo*, which Tuck adduces as evidence of Hobbes's orthodox position at that time (early 1640s); see his “The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes,” 125–27. He quotes, for example, from ch. 26 the words “it must not be thought that the articles of faith are [philosophical] problems; they are laws, and it is inequitable for a private individual to interpret them otherwise than as they are formulated,” but does not quote the sentence that follows: “For a private person to call for a re-examination of matters that have once and for all been settled and determined by the authority of the Supreme Power is absurd and directly counter to the reasons for the Church's peace and unity” (transl. H. W. Jones [Bradford, 1976], 307). It is important to bear in mind that when Hobbes writes “*Ecclesia*,” he means the church governed by the sovereign and entirely dependent on him. Cf. Jacquot and Jones in the introduction to their edition, *Thomas Hobbes, Critique du De Mundo de Thomas White* (Paris 1973), 69, referring also to Deshommeaux's reaction to *De Cive*: “Il veut que le souverain sacerdoce soit joint à la principauté et par conséquent autant de princes, autant de chefs de religion” (letter from 10 Sept. 1642).

<sup>65</sup> Perez Zagorin, “Clarendon and Hobbes,” *Journal of Modern History*, 57 (1985), 593–616.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted by Tuck, “Hobbes's ‘Christian Atheism,’ ” 112. The relevant sentence, however, contains nothing that Payne could not have derived from a critical reading of *De Cive* or *The Elements*, namely “that the Civil sovereign (whether one or more) is chief pastor, and may settle what kind of Church government he shall think it fit for the people's salvation.”

drew up a list of objections late in 1645 or early in 1646, and other critics attacked *De Cive* no less than *Leviathan*.<sup>67</sup> It is of course the changed political situation, and especially the polemical and sometimes highly abusive tone of *Leviathan* which made Hobbes's former friends critical or even hostile. The contemptuous style did Hobbes no good. As Dr. Pope said: in *De Cive* "there is *verbum sapienti*, enough said to let the intelligent reader know what he would be at, but in his *Leviathan* he spreads his butter so thin, that the coursness of his bread is plainly perceived under it."<sup>68</sup> Whatever one may think about this judgment, it rightly points to the fact that in *De Cive* Hobbes did not spell out all the implications of his arguments.

Moreover, a question hardly ever addressed by the proponents of the view that in *Leviathan* Hobbes "seems to have directly repudiated what he had argued in the earlier works" is why Hobbes had *De Cive* as well as *Leviathan* incorporated in the *Opera philosophica* edition from 1668, and why he continued to have such a high opinion of *De Cive*. This would be extremely odd if he had indeed changed his views so radically. Tuck's answer that "after the Restoration, Hobbes realized that *De Cive* could still be an important statement of his views" and that Hobbes realized that "if we are interested in Hobbes's *political* thought, we will still find it at least as clearly set out in *De Cive* as in *Leviathan*," is unconvincing, as if Hobbes could expect his readers to pay attention only to the political arguments of *De Cive* while forgetting about the rest of it.<sup>69</sup>

If there is no "fundamental reversal" or "new direction" in Hobbes's position, but rather a development and an extension of a line of thinking which is already clearly visible in the earlier works, how then should we account for the obvious fact that *Leviathan* contains some extensive discussions on the Trinity, the soul and the after-life, which are absent from the earlier works? Why did Hobbes develop his theological positions in the way he did? A full answer would have to take into account the Latin *Leviathan*, *An Historical Narration Concerning Heresy and the Punishment Thereof* and his other writings on religion, but this is clearly beyond the aim of this article. Besides, there is no simple answer to this question. I suggest that we should resist the temptation to put all the elements into one story, trying to establish a close link between Hobbes's theological thinking and his views of church-state relations.

Tuck has argued that the change in Hobbes's views on church-state relations must be linked to his ideas of hell and the after-life, i.e., with the eschatological aspects of Hobbes's theology. He argues that Hobbes's theory is

<sup>67</sup> Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context*, 195 n. 22 mentions Bramhall, Roger Coke, Eachard, Tenison, and other critics who attacked both *De Cive* and *Leviathan*. Cf. Warrender (ed.), *De Cive, Latin Version*, 17-26.

<sup>68</sup> *Life of Bishop Ward* (1697), 118, quoted by Warrender, ed. *De Cive, Latin Version*, 30.

<sup>69</sup> Preface to *On the Citizen*, xxxiii; italics by Tuck.

“very similar to that of the late Renaissance sceptics who believed that the path to ‘wisdom’ lay in the renunciation of both belief and emotion, and that the wise man would not be led into upsetting and dangerous courses of action by any cognitive commitments.”<sup>70</sup> The liberation from fear is crucial for Hobbes, for as Tuck argues: “the psychological work of the sovereign would not be done unless fear of an after-life could be eliminated [...] it was only if the sovereign was recognised as sole interpreter, that the new eschatology stood a chance.” And “because the traditional apostolic churches were not going to accept a theology of this kind,” he put his hope in the civil sovereign as sole interpreter of Scripture. In other words, Hobbes had to change his position on ecclesiastical polity in order to have his theological ideas preached by the absolute sovereign. I think this reconstruction is highly implausible, and not only from the fact that, as I have argued above, there is no such drastic alteration to be discerned.

First, this view not only ignores the great differences between the skeptical position and Hobbes's philosophical and scientific convictions, but also renders Tuck's own explanation internally inconsistent. It would be far from a skeptic's mind to come up with unprecedented theories about theological issues such as the Trinity, let alone to sell them to the sovereign for preaching. (What would Erasmus or Montaigne have thought about Hobbes's speculations about the Trinity?) It would equally be far from Hobbes's mind to think that men can ever lay down their emotions, beliefs, and passions. His whole political theory is rooted in human physiology, based on emotions, passions, and beliefs. As he writes in *Leviathan*: “For there is no such thing as perpetuall Tranquillity of mind, while we live here; because Life it selfe is but Motion, and can never be without Desire, nor without Feare, no more than without Sense.”<sup>71</sup> Fear (as well as reason of course) is the cement of Hobbes's political philosophy, for without fear there would be no covenants.<sup>72</sup> The principal tenets of the skeptics—*epoche* (suspension of judgment) and *ataraxia* (unperturbedness)—are as alien to Hobbes's whole philosophy as Hobbes's attempt to construct scientific and philosophical theories is from the skeptics' fundamental doubts about the feasibility of such an enterprise. While skeptics suggest that the best way of life is to conform oneself to the laws and customs of society, Hobbes certainly suggests no such thing, for he rejects many customs and laws (in particular common law) of contemporary society. This also makes Tuck's interpretation internally inconsistent, for he associates Hobbes not only with the skeptics, but also credits him with having written “the greatest of the

<sup>70</sup> “The civil religion of Thomas Hobbes,” 132 for this and the following quotations. This interpretation recurs in other places, e.g., the preface to his ed. of *Leviathan*, xl-xli.

<sup>71</sup> Ch. 6 (p. 46/*EW*, III, 51).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *The Elements* I, xv, 13 (p. 79/*EW*, IV, 92-93).

English revolutionary utopias,”<sup>73</sup> “resembling very closely the utopias of the eighteenth or even the nineteenth century, in which a new religion was seen as a necessary part of reconstructing society.” Skeptics, however, are not generally known as authors of revolutionary utopias. Moreover, this interpretation of Hobbes’s theory as “very similar to the late Renaissance sceptics” stands in stark opposition to one of Tuck’s principal arguments that recur in his writings, namely that Hobbes’s natural and political philosophy should be seen as an attempt to *defeat* skepticism. This argument however has been refuted by various scholars, who have shown that Hobbes was not preoccupied with the skeptics or their arguments at all.<sup>74</sup>

Second, even if Hobbes’s reinterpretation of the Christian scheme without a traditional hell had been aimed at relieving people of their fears of eternal torments, it does not follow at all that he was thereby offering people “an entirely new hope—the hope of *eternal* life.”<sup>75</sup> One can take away fear of hell without offering hope of eternal life. In Hobbes’s proposal the reprobated suffer a temporary punishment after which they die a “second death,” that is, they are annihilated and do not live again—a position he bases on the Scripture.<sup>76</sup> Hobbes’s scheme does not offer any more hope of eternal life than the scheme which includes a traditional hell. And he declines of course any speculation about God’s motivation to choose who goes to heaven and who goes to hell.

Third, it is highly implausible that Hobbes had to change his position on ecclesiastical polity in order to have his theological ideas broadcast by the absolute sovereign, or as Tuck writes: “the psychological work of the sovereign would not be done unless fear of an after-life could be eliminated [...] it was only if the sovereign was recognised as sole interpreter, that the new eschatology stood a chance.”<sup>77</sup> As we have seen, Hobbes argues in *The Elements* and *De Cive* that the spiritual and civil powers must reside in one man, that the civil sovereign is Christ’s immediate vicar on earth, who even has “sacerdotal jurisdiction” (*The Elements*, II, vii, 11), that in matters of faith the sovereign can decide which point belongs to the spiritual sphere and what must be counted as divine doctrine, and so forth. Hobbes did not need to work out his views on

<sup>73</sup> Tuck, “The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes,” 135 and the preface to his ed. of *Leviathan*, xliii.

<sup>74</sup> T. Sorell, “Descartes, Hobbes, and the Body of Natural Science,” *The Monist*, 71 (1988), 521-23; Perez Zagorin, “Hobbes’s Early Philosophical Development,” *JHI*, 54 (1993), 505-18, and “Hobbes without Grotius,” *History of Political Thought*, 21 (2000), 16-40; Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1997), 9, 299. Tuck’s reconstruction of Hobbes’s early development hinges on his rejection of Hobbes’s authorship of *A Short Tract* from about 1630—a rejection which cannot be upheld in the light of Hobbes scholarship on this text. See esp. K. Schuhmann, “Le *Short Tract*, première oeuvre philosophique de Hobbes,” *Hobbes Studies*, 8 (1995), 3-36.

<sup>75</sup> “The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes,” 131.

<sup>76</sup> Ch. 38 (p. 315/*EW*, III, 450-51).

<sup>77</sup> “The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes,” 132.

the afterlife, hell, and the soul before he could establish his doctrine on ecclesiastical polity. He leaves us in no doubt about his motivation for discussing the soul, hell, and the afterlife and connected notions. These doctrines had been wrongly expounded by the clergy, and deliberately so in order to secure and extend their powers. In order to safeguard the absolute power of the sovereign, Hobbes has to dismantle these claims. That is why Hobbes clearly states that the “greatest, and main abuse of Scripture, and to which almost all the rest are either consequent, or subservient, is the wresting of it, to prove that the Kingdome of God, mentioned so often in the Scripture, is the present Church....”<sup>78</sup> The other abuses—which Hobbes sees as *subservient* to this one, because they are legitimized by it—concern the rituals of “the turning of Consecration into Conjurament, or Enchantment” and “the Misinterpretation of the words Eternall Life, Everlasting Death, and the Second Death.” The claim that the present Church is the Kingdom of God is the root of all the subsequent claims made by the clergy, for instance that the Church has the power to influence the course of “life” of the disembodied soul after life, and the places where this life can be spent (purgatory, hell). If one does not represent Christ’s church on earth, then one does not have any legitimacy to exercise these spiritual powers. Without denying the fact that Hobbes, like so many of his contemporaries, found these doctrines in themselves interesting and absorbing (witness also his exegetical labors), I think it is clear that his principal motivation in these discussions is to safeguard the absolute power of the sovereign. I have already quoted *The Elements* where he writes that “It is manifest therefore that they who have sovereign power, are immediate rulers of the church under Christ, and all others but subordinate to them. If that were not, but kings should command one thing upon pain of death, and priests another upon pain of damnation, it would be impossible that peace and religion should stand together.”<sup>79</sup> The last part of *Leviathan* makes this abundantly clear where Hobbes, e.g., lists “all those Doctrines, that serve them to keep the possession of this spirituall Sovereignty after it is gotten.”<sup>80</sup>

We should also remember that for Hobbes himself, speculations about theological dogmas such as the Trinity, hell, and the after-life, and the Last Judgment were of no importance to salvation, for which only the belief that Jesus was the Christ was sufficient. But he was tempted to present his views on these issues because they “manifestly tend to Peace, and Loyalty,”<sup>81</sup> as opposed to the alternative interpretations of the Church and its ministers which tended to

<sup>78</sup> *Leviathan*, ch. 44 (p. 419/*EW*, III, 605).

<sup>79</sup> II.vii.10 (167/*EW*, IV, 199).

<sup>80</sup> Ch. 47 (p. 476/*EW*, III, 691).

<sup>81</sup> *Leviathan*, A Review, and Conclusion (p. 489-90/*EW*, III, 711); cf. Hobbes, *Six Lessons to the Professors of Mathematics* (1656), *EW*, VII, 336-37, and the appendix to the Latin *Leviathan*, *OL*, III, 560.

undermine the sovereign's power. And he was also able to do so, because in 1651 the regime was much looser on public religion.

I think therefore that it will not do to suggest that Hobbes's thinking on church-state relations was influenced by his views of the soul, hell, the after-life, and the Last Judgment. Neither is there much evidence that Hobbes's Trinitarianism "clarifies and supports the political teaching,"<sup>82</sup> as another recent critic has argued on the basis of Hobbes's doctrine of the Holy Spirit in *Leviathan* chapter 42: "Here wee have the Person of God born now the third time. For as Moses and the High Priests, were Gods Representative in the Old Testament; and our Saviour himselfe as Man, during his abode on earth: So the Holy Ghost, that is to say, the Apostles, and their successors, in the Office of Preaching, and Teaching, that had received the Holy Spirit, have Represented him ever since."<sup>83</sup> Thus, the power which was imparted to the apostles was not coercive power. But this doctrine is defended *in extenso* in *The Elements*, and while in that work the inspiration of the apostles was not generally described in terms of the work of the Holy Spirit but rather in terms of gifts of the Savior, the essential idea is that their teaching had only the status of teaching, persuasion, and advice. The provenance of the blessing for their teaching may have changed under Hobbes's Trinitarian ideas (roughly, it went over from second to third person of the Trinity), but this does not affect Hobbes's central point.

It is tempting to blend all the elements of Hobbes's development into one story, that is into one causal explanation in terms of a predominant motivation, but we should resist the temptation. When one tries to establish a link between the eschatological and Trinitarian aspects of Hobbes's theology on the one hand with his views on the church-state relations on the other, it is clear that one must argue that the latter changed because the former were introduced or developed only in *Leviathan*. As the account above has suggested, however, the church-state question did not undergo much alteration in Hobbes's thinking, so that the establishment of such a close link becomes unnecessary, indeed implausible.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> George Wright, "Hobbes and the Economic Trinity," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 7 (1999), 397-428, on 414, in an otherwise illuminating and interesting article. I would also question the description that Hobbes's examination of the Economic Trinity "issues in the detailed refutation of Cardinal Bellarmine's assertions ..." (414, my italics). Hobbes had already criticized Bellarmine in *The Elements* without Trinitarian considerations. Cf. *De Cive*, XVII, 24 on the working of the Holy Spirit in the Apostles, again without Trinitarian considerations.

<sup>83</sup> Ch. 42 (p. 339/*EW*, III, 486-87).

<sup>84</sup> I am grateful to Karl Schuhmann, John North and two anonymous readers for their criticisms of an earlier draft of this article.